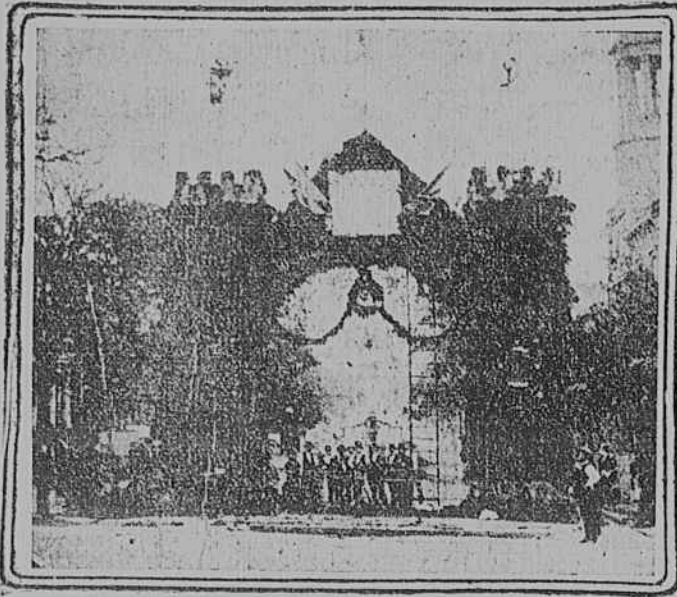


The Capitol Square a Century Ago, and the Capitol Square To-Day.

BY ALICE M. TYLER.



Triumphal arch at corner of Eighth and Grace Streets, through which procession passed to the unveiling of the Jackson Monument, October 26, 1875.

WHEN the seat of State government was removed from Williamsburg to Richmond, in the year 1779, there was in this city no executive mansion and no capitol. On the hill where the governor's house was afterward built was a small two-story frame house, that was secured to meet the needs of the chief State official, refugeeing before the approach of the British forces. For many years subsequent a wooden building on the northwest corner of Cary and Fourteenth Streets was a meeting place for the General Assembly of Virginia, and the different taverns in Richmond—the Swan, the Bird in Hand, the Rising Sun and the Red Bell—were frequented by members of the Governor's Council.

Richmond was still a struggling unkempt village. Capitol Square was overgrown with scrub pines, chinquapin bushes and sassafras. In many places its surface was bare gravel, washed with gullies where the rains had washed furrows in its course.

The "old capitol," as the Cary and Fourteenth legislative building was called, fell into disrepair, when the General Assembly no longer occupied it. A business house owned by J. S. & Company was built on its site, but it was burned at the fall of Richmond in 1865. E. A. Saunders & Company now have their establishment on this corner.

Location on Shockoe Hill Decided.

As early in May 1779, the Legislature of Virginia took action regarding buildings appropriated to the needs of the Governor of Virginia and his legislative bodies, they having been forced to occupy hired quarters not in the least compatible with the dignity of their office. Their present location. Although continued hostilities between the Colonies and the Mother Country delayed the carrying out of legislative enactment, a question of choice as to the location of square and capitol was decided in May 1780, when the General Assembly met at Richmond Hill, as against Richmond Hill and the neighborhood of Saint John's Church, warmly recommended by Dr. John Contee Adams.

Thomas Jefferson was Governor of Virginia on May 1, 1780, when the General Assembly first convened in the city of Richmond. The destruction by fire of a second capitol building at Williamsburg and the fact that a marauding expedition of the British, commanded by Sir George Collier, had taken possession of Norfolk and Portsmouth and sent outbursts to burn and destroy throughout the surrounding country, rendered it altogether unsafe for the seat of government to remain where it was. It was decided to move to Richmond, and the General Assembly met at the head of the



Houdon statue of George Washington, in rotunda of capitol.

British land forces, chose to make an attack upon Williamsburg.

The law of capitol removal and provided that a certain amount of land in Richmond should be set aside for the use of the State and that, upon this land should be built a capitol hall of justice for the courts, a house for the Executive Council and an Executive Mansion. These were to be erected in a handsome manner with walls of brick or stone, and portions where the same may be convenient or ornamental, and with pillars and pavements of stone.

Directors Designated.

For the selection of ground in an open and airy part of the town, the choice of architects, plans and of building materials, five directors were designated by the legislature. In May, 1780, the General Assembly decided that public buildings already enumerated should be located on Shockoe Hill, and that His Excellency, Thomas Jefferson, Archibald Cary, Robert Carter Nicholas, Richard Adams, Edmund Randolph, Turner Southall, Robert

Goode, James Buchanan and Samuel Duvall, should direct the laying off of the grounds and the form and dimensions of the buildings. The area of land considered necessary was mentioned as "six whole squares, surrounded by four streets, and containing all the ground within such streets. This ground for public use was to be acquired by a writ of ad quod damnum, the owners to receive a just compensation for it."

Shockoe Creek at this time formed the western boundary line of Richmond. As the new public buildings were to go up on Shockoe Hill, its area evidently had to be enlarged to include the site indicated. So land was obtained from the county officials of Henric and the corporate limits of Richmond were extended. Richmond residents whose land was bought included the familiar names of Gann, Currie, Price and Syme. Because rumors arose during the latter half of the nineteenth century that the State had not fully established her claim to all the land given up to this city for the site of its public buildings, Judge S. Bassett French was employed during Governor

Kemper's administration, to settle the State's title definitely and forever.

Judge French Discovered Deeds.

After long and arduous investigation Judge French discovered in the offices of city and county clerk the deeds given and the prices paid by the State for every parcel of land condemned in 1779. Also settlements made with claimants under the operation of the William Byrd lottery, by which Colonel William Byrd III, had disposed, to advantage, of a major part of his property in Richmond. The drawings in this lottery had taken place in November, of 1748.

In 1752, Richmond was incorporated as a city and its first charter was granted, providing for a mayor, recorder, four aldermen and six councilmen, the mayor, aldermen and councilmen to constitute a Hustings Court for the trying of cases within the city limits. William Foushee, M. D., was Richmond's first mayor and a census taken at this time by order of the council showed the population to be 1,031. The population had increased to 3,737 by the year 1800, but the Capitol Square still remained "a scrubby waste where

hogs roamed." The present governor's mansion was completed by 1812, however, and about 1816 and 1817, a Frenchman, a landscape artist named Godefroid, was employed to improve the grounds around the capitol building. Improvements were to be protected by an enclosure. Mons Godefroid followed in his laying off and planting of the grounds the stiff and formal rules of the early nineteenth century period. Trees stood opposite each other in straight lines. Grass plots were crossed at right angles by straight walks, from which others, narrower but equally as formal, branched.

The lower or southern half of the square was so unequal and broken as to its surface that Mons Godefroid laid off its approach in two terraces, each of considerable depth. Flights of stone terraces were placed at equal intervals for the use of pedestrians, both on the eastern and western sides of the plateau crowned by the capitol. Godefroid, Sabatini and Paine.

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transform the site of the capitol into a park. The terraces were shaded with

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The unveiling of Jackson Statue, Capitol Square, October 26, 1875, with the cadet corps seen in centre of view.



Bust of Lafayette, in rotunda of capitol.

trees and in summer, were sweet with the song of birds. Public speakers often addressed audiences in one or the other of the depositories. Each had a never failing spring of limpid water from which thirsty visitors might be refreshed.

P. A. Sabatini was the man who planned and constructed the iron railing around the square, which cost nearly \$20,000. Oris Paine was the contractor for the stone work and for the laying of the tiles to receive the rainfalls that were to protect the precincts of the square from intrusions and impart to it the dignity of privacy and seclusion. The expense of improving the capitol grounds of leveling, grading and preparing the soil for ornamental trees, so barren was the original spot, was something considerable.

Changes Under Governor Wise by Thomas T. Giles, Esq.

During the administration of Governor Henry A. Wise, in 1856, many of the earlier features of the capitol square were changed and the appearance of the grounds took on an appearance, retained largely at the present day. Thomas T. Giles, Esq., was appointed by Governor Wise to direct the transformation effected in the capitol square during the Wise administration. This was done by digging down the old terraces, filling up the dells and draining the springs. The ground in front of the southern portion was graded and a promenade descended to Bank Street was smoothed and rendered gradual and comfortable. Suggestions of Crawford, Sculptor of Washington Statue.

The location of the Washington Monument caused the main entrance zone to the capitol square to be changed from the north side, opposite the Old City Hall, to the eastern end of Grace Street. The corner stone of the statue was laid in the square on February 22, 1856. A very distinguished gathering, including President Zachary Taylor, was present.

It was not until November of 1857, that the statue, sent from Munich, reached Richmond. It was unveiled February 22, 1858, a sunbeam breaking through a snowfall and saluting those who gathered to witness the event. The statue, in the moment of the veil's withdrawal, Mr. Crawford, the sculptor of the monument, did not have his plan carried out in its situation. He thought it should be put upon the elevated platform in front of the southern portion and occupy the same relation to the capitol as the statue of Minerva does to her shrine on the heights of Mount Olympus. The new pedestal, office and custom house had not then been built. Mr. Crawford suggested that the State should buy the then comparatively few and valueless structures occupying the space between the capitol and Main Street, so that the monument might have been approached through a series of steps and a final steps and terraces. These suggestions were supplemented by others, recommending the extension of the square northward, to Broad Street, the acquisition of the Powhatan House and the taking in of the old City Hall, the only building of importance then in the way of this recommendation.

But the General Assembly of Virginia, in 1912 was not the only body in the State remarkable alone, in what it did, in the giving way of a court room floor in the capitol and the killing of sixty-five people in the audience, April 12, 1879, it was on the turf beneath the trees of the square, that sixty-five bodies were laid, as they were recovered from the debris of the building where death had overtaken them. It was in the square that the clergy of the city then gathered and raised their voices in prayer for the dead, and for the living from whom the dead had been taken away.

It was through a triumphal arch at the corner of Eighth and Grace Streets that the procession of October 26, 1875, passed into the square to the unveiling of the Jackson statue, a gift to the

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What have the legislators of the twentieth century accomplished in the way of maintaining the standards established for them by the great statesmen and law givers of Virginia's earlier days who, men of affairs they were, could still find time for whatever was necessary to render the State capitol and its surroundings a credit to their Virginia and to the Nation?

Now the square formerly lovely with its velvet turf, its trimly kept flower beds, its shrubbery, its rare evergreens, its blooming crape myrtles and magnolias, its sombre enough through their absence. The flowers and foliage plants died and none have been replanted. There is no shrubbery, nothing but trees, which are, of course, beautiful in themselves, but suffering sadly from neglect and decay.

Associated With State and City History.

The capitol square is associated with much State and city history that all Virginians hold dear. Its gates were decorated for Lafayette's reception in 1824. At the dedication of its main street approach, they did devote taste and the expenditure of money toward the beautifying of the most historic park in Richmond.

Through the capitol square after the battles of Chancellorsville and Yellow Tavern, the bodies of Stonewall Jackson and J. E. B. Stuart were borne to the rotunda of the capitol, through the square, in the midst of a people's mourning.

When the Ellyson-Caboon case resulted in the giving way of a court room floor in the capitol and the killing of sixty-five people in the audience, April 12, 1879, it was on the turf beneath the trees of the square, that sixty-five bodies were laid, as they were recovered from the debris of the building where death had overtaken them. It was in the square that the clergy of the city then gathered and raised their voices in prayer for the dead, and for the living from whom the dead had been taken away.

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military, this tower was the guard house. Quarters for the company were provided at the armory, destroyed in April, of 1865. About half a mile distant from the capitol, near the Washington Works, the ruins of the armory were long shown to visitors and lovers of Richmond's past history.

A curious incident led to two sentinels being placed daily for years on the eastern and western side of the capitol and a solitary one inside, for the protection of Washington and Lafayette. This guard-post was because a prominent but somewhat eccentric citizen of Richmond in a fit of political excitement and in the presence of many of those who knew and saw him, said his custom to break a small bit off the Washington statue. This act of vandalism aroused great resentment and prompt measures were taken to prevent its repetition.

Thereafter a military figure paced around the capitol building and heard the bells struck by the town clock in the center. At nine o'clock came the gates of the square were secured by chains and locks, the guard in the bell tower struck the hour, and his cry, "Alas Well" was echoed back by the capitol guards.

Abolitionists and the Square.

The Virginia Legislature of 1850, thought it worth while to call to their aid so great a man as Thomas Jefferson, so that their State capitol might worthily maintain the prestige of the Old Dominion. A later General Assembly employed the best landscape artist in the State to beautify and adorn the square. After the foundation artist came the choice in selection of the architect for the grounds around the capitol building were bare of trees. The result of choice appeared in thirty different varieties of trees and shrubs. South of the capitol building were two hemlock or iron-wood trees, the hemlock, the western fountain tree was a variety of the same tree, called the hemlock-beam. Other tree specimens included a rare exotic, the Japanese Saphora; an uncommon variety of maple, several orange trees, the blackberry or sugar berry tree, the winged, Dutch and American elm, several kinds of maples, the box elder, magnolia, and two Glanville mulberry trees, one popular and exonerated London trees, a horse-chestnut, a white oak, several birches, ash, a hawthorn, two dogwoods, mimosa, crape myrtles and the flowering quince.

So it would seem that although the lawmakers of the State lost a great opportunity when they put aside Mr. Crawford's suggestions as to an extension of the capitol square, and the Main Street approach, they did devote taste and the expenditure of money toward the beautifying of the most historic park in Richmond.

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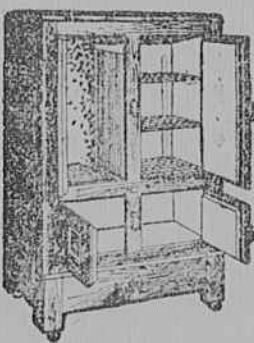
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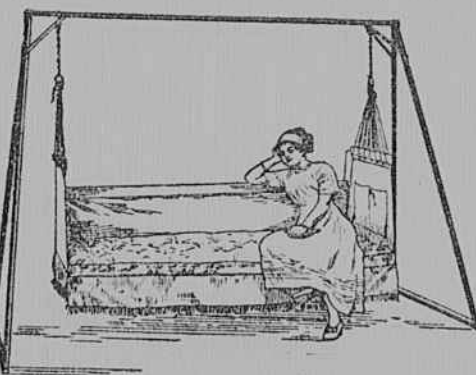
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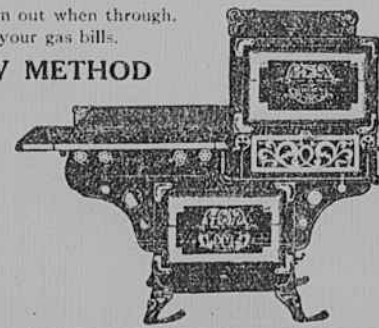
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